

Israel's War on Journalism | Palestinian Reporters + Their Families In Gaza Are Targeted For Assassination



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How many foreign reporters are in Gaza? None. The Palestinian reporters who fill the void often pay with their lives.

Chris Hedges | consortiumnews.com

There are some 4,000 foreign reporters accredited in Israel to cover the war. They stay in luxury hotels. They go on dog and pony shows orchestrated by the Israeli military. They can, on rare occasions, be escorted by Israeli soldiers on lightning visits to Gaza, where they are shown alleged weapons caches or tunnels the military says are used by Hamas.



They dutifully attend daily press conferences. They are given off-the-record briefings by senior Israeli officials who feed them information that often turns out to be untrue. They are Israel's unwitting and sometimes witting propagandists, stenographers for the architects of apartheid and genocide, hotel room warriors.

Bertolt Brecht acidly called them the spokesmen of the spokesmen.

And how many foreign reporters are there in Gaza? None.

The Palestinian reporters in Gaza who fill the void often pay with their lives. They are targeted, along with their families, for assassination.

At least 134 journalists and media workers in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon, have been killed and 69 have been imprisoned, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, marking the deadliest period for journalists since the organization began collecting data in 1992.

Israel bombed a building on Friday in southern Lebanon housing seven media organizations, killing three journalists from *Al Mayadeen* and *Al Manar* and injuring 15 others. Since Oct. 7, Israel has killed 11 journalists in Lebanon.

Al Jazeera cameraman Fadi al-Wahidi, who was shot in the neck in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza by an Israeli sniper earlier this month, is in a coma. Israel has refused permission for him to seek medical care outside of Gaza.

Like most of the targeted journalists, including his murdered colleague Shireen Abu Akleh, he was wearing a helmet and flak jacket that identified him as press.

The Israeli military has branded as "terrorists" six Palestinian journalists in Gaza who work for *Al Jazeera*.

"These 6 Palestinians are among the last journalists surviving Israel's onslaught in Gaza," United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories,

Francesca Albanese, said. "Declaring them 'terrorists' sounds like a death sentence."

[Meanwhile an Israeli journalist has taken direct part in combat while acting as a reporter.]

The scale and savagery of the Israeli assault on the media dwarfs anything I witnessed during my two decades as a war correspondent, including in Sarajevo where Serb snipers regularly took aim at reporters.

Twenty-three journalists were killed in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav Wars between 1991 and 1995. Twenty-two were killed when I covered the war in El Salvador. Sixty-eight journalists were killed in World War II and 63 were killed in Vietnam.

But unlike in Gaza, Bosnia and El Salvador, journalists were usually not targeted.

Israel's assault on press freedom is unlike anything we have experienced since William Howard Russell, the godfather of modern war reporting, sent back dispatches from the Crimean War. Its onslaught against journalists is in a category by itself.

Representative James P. McGovern and 64 House members sent a letter to President Joseph Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling for the United States to push for Israel to allow unimpeded access for U.S. and international journalists. In July, over 70 media and civil society organizations signed an open letter calling on Israel to permit foreign reporters into Gaza.

Israel has not budged. Its ban on international journalists in Gaza remains in place. Its genocide grinds forward. Hundreds of Palestinian civilians are killed and wounded daily. During October, Israel killed at least 770 Palestinians in northern Gaza.

Israel spins out its lies and fabrications, from Hamas using Palestinians as human shields, to mass rape and beheaded babies, to a captive press that slavishly amplifies them. By the time the lies are exposed, often weeks or months later, the media cycle has moved on and few notice.

Israel's wholesale censorship and assassination of journalists will have ominous consequences. It further erodes what few protections we once had as war correspondents. It sends an unequivocal message to any government, despot or dictator that seeks to mask its crimes.

It heralds, like the genocide itself, a new world order, where mass murder is normalized, totalitarian censorship is permissible and journalists who try and expose the truth have very short life expectancies.

Israel, with the fulsome support of the U.S. government, is eviscerating the last shreds of freedom of the press.

Those who wage war, any war, seek to shape public opinion. They court the reporters they can domesticate, the ones who prostrate themselves before generals and, although they do not openly admit it, seek to stay as far away from combat as possible.

These are the "good" journalists. They like to "play" at being a soldier. They enthusiastically assist in disseminating propaganda in the guise of reporting. They want to do their part for the war effort, to be part of the club. Sadly, they constitute the majority of the media in the wars I covered.

All CNN journalists reporting on Israel and Palestine must submit their work for review by the network's Jerusalem bureau prior to publication, a bureau that is required to abide by rules set down by Israeli military censors.

These domesticated journalists and news organizations are, as Robert Fisk pointed out, "prisoners of the language of power." They dutifully parrot the official lexicon — "terrorists," "peace process," "two state solution" and "Israel's right to defend itself."

The New York Times, The Intercept writes,

"instructed journalists covering Israel's war on the Gaza Strip to restrict the use of the terms 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing' and to 'avoid' using the phrase 'occupied

territory' when describing Palestinian land, according to a copy of an internal memo obtained by The Intercept."

"The memo also instructs reporters not to use the word Palestine 'except in very rare cases' and to steer clear of the term 'refugee camps' to describe areas of Gaza historically settled by displaced Palestinians expelled from other parts of Palestine during previous Israeli-Arab wars," *The Intercept* notes. "The areas are recognized by the United Nations as refugee camps and house hundreds of thousands of registered refugees."

"There is no battle between power and the media," Fisk noted. "Through language, we have become them."

Retired General David Petraeus, one of the authors of the 2006 U.S. Counterinsurgency Manual used by U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, argues that persuading the public that you are winning — even if, as in Afghanistan, you are trapped in a quagmire — is more important than military superiority. The domesticated media is vital in perpetrating this deception.

Then there are the real journalists. They shine a light into the machinery of power. They tell the truth, for as the poet Seamus Heaney said, "There's such a thing as truth and it can be told." They make public the cruelty, mendacity and criminality of the powerful. They expose the collaboration of the domesticated media.

SAY HIS NAME!
ISSAM ABDULLAH
Murdered by the
IDF in Lebanon



Protester in London on Oct. 29, 2023, holding a sign in memory of Reuters journalist Issam Abdullah killed in southern Lebanon by an IDF missile strike on Oct. 13, 2023. (Alisdare Hickson, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0)

To the powerful, the war makers and the domesticated media, these real journalists are the enemy. This is the reason Julian Assange was mercilessly hounded and persecuted for 14 years. *WikiLeaks* published a 2,000-page Ministry of Defence document where British government officials equated investigative journalists with terrorists. The animosity is not new. What is new is the scale of Israel's assault on journalism.

Israel has not defeated Hamas. It has not defeated Hezbollah. It will not defeat Iran. But it must convince its own public, and the rest of the world, it is winning. Censorship and the silencing of journalists who expose Israel's war crimes and the suffering Israel inflicts on civilians is an Israeli priority.

It would be reassuring to call Israel an outlier, a nation that did not share our values, a nation that we support in spite of its atrocities. But of course, Israel is an extension of ourselves.

As the playwright Harold Pinter said:

"US foreign policy could be best defined as follows: kiss my arse or I'll kick your head in. It is as simple and as crude as that. What is interesting about it is that it is so incredibly successful. It possesses the structures of disinformation, use of rhetoric, distortion of language, which are very persuasive, but are actually a pack of lies. It is very successful propaganda. They have the money, they have the technology, they have all the means to get away with it, and they do."

In accepting the Nobel prize for literature, Pinter said:

"The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while

masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis."

The most important impediment to Israel's mass hypnosis are the Palestinian journalists in Gaza. This is why the kill rate is so high. It is why U.S. officials say nothing. They, too, hate real journalists. They, too, demand reporters domesticate themselves to scurry like rats from one choreographed press event to the next.

The U.S. government says and does nothing to protect the press because it endorses Israel's campaign against the media, as it endorses Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Journalists, along with the Palestinians, are to be extinguished.

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